

something gave you the nerve (to touch my hand) by barbiewriter

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti)

Genre: 5 + 1 Things, Alternate Universe - No Pennywise (IT), Beverly Marsh Knows Everything, Bill Denbrough is a Good Friend, Break Up, Breaking Up & Making Up, Bullying, Eddie Kaspbrak Loves Richie Tozier, Falling In Love, First Kiss, Fluff and Angst, Gay Eddie Kaspbrak, Getting Back Together, Getting Together, Goodbyes, Growing Up, Happy Ending, Holding Hands, M/M, Mutual Pining, No Underage Sex, Period-Typical Homophobia, Pining, Richie Tozier & Stanley Uris Are Best Friends, Richie Tozier Loves Eddie Kaspbrak, Richie Tozier is a Mess, Saying The Wrong Name During Sex, Sexual Repression, Weddings

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Richie Tozier/Other(s)

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-12-11

Updated: 2019-12-11

Packaged: 2019-12-13 03:06:10

Rating: Explicit

Warnings: Underage

Chapters: 1

Words: 10,794

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

5 times richie was scared + 1 time he wasn't.

something gave you the nerve (to touch my hand)

Author's Note:

this is my first time writing Them so hopefully the characterization is off. love to jenna for letting me yap at her + for being my beta babey ♡

there is a brief sex scene between richie and another man but it isn't graphic. the underage tag only applies for the first three sections.

title is from it's nice to have a friend by taylor swift!

1.

It should be such a subtle thing, but God does it feel like more than that.

And he shouldn't be freaking out about it so much, really. He and Eddie touch all the time. Like, all the fucking time. They can't be in a room without standing shoulder to shoulder, and they've been sharing beds for as long as Eddie's been sneaking out to come to sleepovers, and sometimes Eddie will even steal bites of food from Richie's plate. Richie pretends to hate it, but secretly he's glad he's the only one Eddie feels comfortable enough with to risk being exposed to his germs.

He's grateful for the movie playing on the television, distracting everyone. He hopes, at least. Sometimes he notices Bev or Stan looking at him while he looks at Eddie and it makes him want to throw up a little, but they always laugh when he distracts with a mom or dick joke -- well, Bev does. Stan mostly just rolls his eyes. The point is, though, that he doesn't think they know *why* he's looking.

While he's freaked about thinking about touching Eddie like that, about maybe going through with it, God. What if Eddie screams, or pushes him away? He could feel the same way or he could... he could be like everyone else, and Richie will lose all of his friends over this tiny little touch. What if Eddie thinks he's a freak?

He tries to tell himself that's not going to happen. That Eddie could be just like him, and that's why he touches Richie back so much. Richie *knows* this. He notices. He's been watching, ever since he realized maybe not everyone thought about Eddie Kaspbrak the way he thinks about Eddie Kaspbrak.

When Eddie stands next to Bill, he doesn't get close enough to press up arm-to-arm. He moves away when Bill gets close enough to, too, because Richie's scooted Bill over to touch Eddie before to see what happens, and Eddie always scoots away and crosses his arms to make himself smaller. He doesn't do it with Mike, either, because he watched them hug in a completely non-creepy way and it was definitely shorter than his and Richie's hugs are, like, by a lot, and Eddie turned his face *away* from Mike's neck rather than towards it like he does with Richie. And when he rides on the back of Bev's bike, he doesn't lean all the way in against her, and he puts his hands on her arms to keep him steady, rather than on her shoulders like he does with Richie. Richie is also the only one allowed to touch his fanny pack. Like, at all. Richies even put it on before for a few seconds before Eddie started screeching at him, and last week Stan tried to pick it up to hand it to him and Eddie told him that he was holding it wrong. There's no wrong way to hold a fucking fanny pack, in Richie's opinion. Even with Ben, who no one has been mad at ever, Eddie doesn't put his feet up in his lap like he does with Richie's.

It might be nothing, really. It might just be that Richie is reading entirely too deep into things and he's so stupid in like with Eddie

Kasprak that he's seeing things when nothing is there. That idea will probably kill Richie, though, and his young, yearning gay heart is trying to have a little faith just this once. Thinking that he's not completely, utterly alone is both the most exhilarating and terrifying thought he can have.

There's obviously a lot on the line for such a casual touch.

"I'm cold," Richie announces, and everyone turns to look at him. He realizes at that moment that maybe just putting the blanket over him and Eddie might have been a more subtle course of action, seeing that now everyone in the room is looking at him holding a blanket in his lap and sitting next to Eddie rather than paying attention to the movie like they should've been.

"Shut up, Richie," Eddie says, reaching over and tugging on the corner of the blanket. "If you're gonna be obnoxious at least share this shit," he huffs, and Richie very pointedly does not look at him because everyone *else* is looking at him and he's worried they might notice something about the way he looks at Eddie.

"Of course I'll share with you, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie says, unfolding the blanket and spreading it over the both of them. Eddie has his legs folded and leaning to one side, towards Richie, even though the screen is on his other side. Eddie's head is also extremely close to resting on his shoulder, though his gaze is turned towards the screen. The blanket covers both of them and the little space between them, which is really the most important part of the whole blanket plan he'd so cleverly devised.

When Richie looks around to make sure that they're no longer the center of attention, Beverly gives him a confused look, a pointed cock

of her head before looking back to the television and Stan side-eyes him. He'd be more concerned about both of those if he didn't constantly get those reactions from them, anyway. Other than that, though, the others seem completely and utterly focused on the film playing on Bill's living room TV.

Luckily, they're watching Edward Scissorhands, and even though it's not a scary movie, Eddie is scared of everything, pretty much. Maybe if he can just... get over the mental block in his mind and just fucking do it, and Eddie isn't like him, maybe he'll think it's just a friendly move of comfort. It's not exactly the best-case scenario, but it's better than Eddie thinking he's a total and utter freak for trying to touch him. Honestly, right now, he's a beggar. Not a chooser. He'll take what he can get as far as physical intimacy from Eddie goes.

Now that the blanket is spread over both of them, tucked up to their necks and obscuring them from the view of the other Losers, there's really nothing else stopping him from actually doing the thing he's been stressing about all fucking day.

Richie is trying to relax by focusing on the movie -- maybe if he pays attention to Johnny Depp then he'll be able to do this more naturally, but unfortunately the whole movie is a guy whose hands are so fucked that he can't do anything with them, so the whole not-thinking plan isn't really doing too well. That's when he notices Eddie move, slipping his hand from over the blanket to beneath it.

Richie checks everyone's eyes once more, trying to see where they're looking. He's pleased to see that everyone is indeed looking at the screen still, and he focuses on the task at hand. Putting his hand under the blanket, but doing it normally and naturally in a way that won't draw attention to himself or spook Eddie. He tries to think of other times he's put his hand under a blanket but it's such a niche,

thoughtless action that he can't come up with much. Just going for it is probably the best course of action, but it is also utterly terrifying and he really, really is overthinking this whole mess. The way Eddie had done it had been so careless, just tucking his hand beneath the fabric. Maybe so unintentional that he'd really just been cold.

He can't let himself think like that, though. He just has to go for it, head-on. Just put his hand beneath the blanket and pray for the best. Does praying work if you're gay? Richie isn't sure.

Swallowing, Richie takes one last breath and sticks his hand under the blanket, making sure to keep it right on top of his thigh. This whole plan revolves around timing, after all, and the last thing he wants to do is rush it. Even just being this close to doing it is making him nervous, making his hands get clammy. He wants to stop, obviously, because sweat is, like, gross and he doesn't even know if Eddie wants to hold his hand but he knows Eddie isn't going to want to feel Richie *sweat* on him. There isn't much he can do about it but wipe his hand on his pants or calm down and the latter is most positively not happening, so he just keeps wiping and hopes he doesn't look like he's jerking off or anything.

He waits for another nerve-racking two minutes before wiping the sweat on his palm once more and sliding his hand off his legs, pressing it on the couch cushion beside him. Ever so slowly, just millimeter by millimeter, Richie's hand moves across the cushion. He's moved maybe an inch when he nearly rips his hand away on account of Eddie lifting his hand, bringing it up to itch a little at his jaw before putting it back down between them. He's not sure if it's a trick of the light or what, but Richie wants to say he saw Eddie glance over at him. Maybe it's wishful thinking.

He steels himself and goes back to ever so slowly edging his way back

towards Eddie's fingers. It feels like it takes ages, absolute hours from each little scootch to the next. He wonders how he hasn't hit Eddie's hand by now, how much space is between them -- if maybe Eddie knows what he's doing and has tucked his hands between his legs to spare him the embarrassment of having Eddie pull away from him.

Then, his pinkie ever so slightly brushes skin and both of them freeze. Richie is careful not to move anything else, just to see how Eddie responds. Eddie is similarly still and Richie can see his eyes darting around to their friends to see if anyone has noticed anything. Richie's heart is pounding in his chest from just the barest contact of pinkie-on-pinkie action.

After a minute of contact, Richie wiggles his pinkie a little. It's nothing offensive, just... just movement. Just to show that this was intentional, and not an accident. If Eddie freaks out he'll just lean over and tickle him and the scene caused by Eddie's screeching and kicking at the feeling of Richie's fingers on his sides will hopefully cover up the fact that Richie's heart is crushed.

He watches the bob of Eddie's throat as he swallows and then Eddie moves his finger back. The two of them sit there for a moment, just nudging their fingers against one another's. Richie moves his hand over a little more and hooks his pinkie around Eddie's, and Eddie's breath catches.

He might as well be a statue, he's so still. He's glancing nervously around the room once more before his hand moves and he's hooking his finger with Richie's. Richie has to bite his lips together from smiling or saying something dumb and bringing attention to both of them.

He's just scared. They both are.

It happens quite quickly after that, and the hooked pinkies evolve into fingers laced together and their palms touching. Turns out that Eddie's hands are similarly sweaty so there isn't much room to complain about clammy palms -- and after all, it probably doesn't help that they're hiding their hands under such a thick blanket.

When the movie is over and they all decide to ride their bikes down to the corner store, no one seems to notice, either, when they're drying their sweaty palms on their shorts.

2.

Probably the best thing about holding hands with Eddie that one time is that now he gets to hold Eddie's hand *all* the time.

Well, not all the time, but almost whenever he wants. As long as it's just them or they can hide their hands when they're around the rest of the Losers, they do. It's fucking great, in Richie's opinion, that they get to at all.

It's an innocent, pure, simple form of affection that Richie is nearly sure Eddie means in the same way he does. He thinks about it a lot -- if maybe Eddie is just holding his hand because he holds everyone's hand in private, except once Stan walks in on them holding hands and they pull away and Stan gives Richie that same distasteful look he gives him when Richie burps or tries to put his foot in his face. Stan doesn't say anything about the hand-holding, maybe he didn't

even see it, but he does call Richie disgusting for putting a frog in his backpack when he wasn't looking, and that Richie is going to have to clean the guts off his chemistry textbook.

It's not as much confirmation as say, a conversation between him and Eddie might provide, but it tells him a lot anyway. That he's scared of getting caught -- that's fine. Richie is really scared of getting caught, too. It also tells him that he probably doesn't hold hands with Stan because if he did, he probably wouldn't have pulled away so quickly. And if Eddie's not holding Stan's hand, well, he's probably not holding anyone else's hand because Stan has very holdable hands. Richie would hold his hand platonically if that was something he could do.

The worst thing about holding hands with Eddie that one time is that now he can't stop thinking of all the other things he wants to do with Eddie, like *kissing him on the mouth* .

It wouldn't be so terrifying of a thought if holding hands and kissing weren't so far apart on the scale of intimacy. Holding hands was something you did with family, in church, with friends in hard times. Richie sure as fuck wasn't kissing his family on the mouth, so to say he was having a bit of a hard time convincing himself he was just going to go for it and risk it all was a bit of a stretch.

He tries to reassure himself by saying that he had to take a risk last time, too, and that one paid off. Like, a ton. He's living his almost-best life getting to hold Eddie's hand.

Furthermore, in the moments when he can convince himself that kissing Eddie is a good idea, he can't fathom *how* he might go about it. It's not like he can just do it in public or anything like that. Or in

the Clubhouse, because he doesn't want to risk anyone walking in on them. Richie thinks about maybe sneaking them into a movie and kissing him in the back row, or possibly maybe going down to the quarry and convincing Eddie to go swimming with him. Or maybe out in the forest, or he could sneak up to Eddie's room, or Eddie could sneak out and they could find somewhere.

Ultimately, Richie's plan doesn't really matter because he's not the one who initiates it anyway.

Richie is no stranger to being beaten up. Really. Ever since he got stuck with his coke-bottle glasses and didn't fit in exactly like the rest of the kids, he's known the feeling of fists and feet flying at him. It's usually best just to curl up and take it, he finds, and the bullies will lose interest. Fighting back mostly just pisses them off more.

This time, in particular, he tries to run, at least. Henry and Patrick and whatever other sorry assholes they've got loitering around can't catch him as long as he gets to his bike, but they're faster than him. They empty his bag across the street before focusing in on him.

Richie pulls his glasses off and holds them to his chest. His mom is gonna kill him if he breaks another pair.

He's not sure how long it takes for them to lose interest, but the kicking stops. He pulls his hands away from his chest and his glasses are thankfully unbroken, though he's not sure the same can be said about his ribs. Richie lies on his back a moment on the pavement, but Eddie's voice in the back of his head reminds him that he could, like, drown in his own blood or something if he does that while his nose is still bleeding.

And speaking of Eddie, “What the fuck are you doing?!” Comes his voice, and in the low light, Richie can see Eddie leaning over him. “What the fuck happened?”

“Bowers.” It doesn’t take any elaboration.

Eddie’s face screws up, probably at the blood. “You’re gonna drown in your own blood, idiot, sit up,” he says, glancing up and down the street before climbing off his bike and helping Richie sit up. Richie turns and spits blood in the grass.

“Am I still pretty?” He smiles, displaying bloody teeth. Eddie makes a face.

“Come on,” he says, walking into the street to gather up Richie’s things, “my mom is at the pharmacy, so you can come over.”

They ride back to Eddie’s house, Richie’s bag on Eddie’s shoulders. Eddie has him sit down at the table and paces all over the place, getting gauze and isopropyl alcohol and bandaids and ice to make sure not a single scrape or bruise goes undressed.

Richie knows he’s in love with Eddie. He had to, or else he’d never have carved their initials on the kissing bridge. It was his own quiet act of defiance, putting his love out there for everyone to see, out there with all the ‘normal’ couples. There was nothing not-normal about him and Eddie, Richie was positive. His love for Eddie was no different than whoever loved ‘Amber’ or ‘HTK.’ He knew that.

His gaze is trained on the ugly tile floor of Sonia's kitchen while he holds an ice pack wrapped in a towel to his eye. Then he's being kissed.

It happens so quickly he hardly even notices it's happening before it's over, and the spot where he'd been looking is occupied with Eddie, his eyes wide and his hands covering his mouth. They both just stand there a moment, staring at one another. Finally, Eddie speaks.

"Sorry," he whispers. His eyes are wet and Richie feels similarly terrified.

He shakes his head. "No, no. Don't be," Richie promises frantically. "It's -- it's okay, Eddie. I -- I really liked it." He swallows thickly. Yeah, Eddie just kissed him, but... but what if he regretted it? What if Eddie was just trying it out to see if he liked it and he decided he didn't and that's why he was apologizing?

He must look pretty gross, blood-soaked shirt, a wad of red tissue jammed up his nose, a bandaid on his jaw and his eye swollen shut. Still, Eddie isn't saying anything and he's already too far gone to turn back.

"I really like *you* , Eddie," Richie admits as if that's not obvious enough. There's this underlying sense of dread in his gut, like something really bad is going to happen. He's getting clammy just having to sit in anticipation of what Eddie might say next.

Eddie shifts nervously on his feet, playing with the hem of his shirt. "Good," he says quietly, his eyes darting around. "'Cause... 'cause I like you, too," Eddie tells him matter-of-factly, a tone of defiance in his voice.

"Really?" Richie asks, eyes wide.

"Shut up," Eddie tells him. "We can't tell anyone."

Richie wants to say *obviously, dumbass* , but he doesn't. He just nods. He can do that.

He knows Eddie wants to be proud of him, or else he wouldn't risk all this. He wouldn't risk getting caught if he didn't love Richie just as intensely as Richie loved him.

He's just scared. They both are.

3.

There's nothing worse than the moment Eddie sees him.

By now, he's been sneaking up to Eddie's room for years. He knows the route like the back of his hand: drop his bike in the bushes, through the back gate, up the tree and onto the roof outside his window. If Eddie was there, he'd let him in. If he wasn't, pocket knife to pry the screen off, then to unhook the latch.

Today he's popping the screen off for the last time. That's when Eddie sees him.

His boyfriend -- yes, *boyfriend* -- is rubbing an eye as he comes out of his bathroom, looking very soft in his tee-shirt and plaid sweats. His hair is a little messed up and though he's about to go to bed, Richie thinks he looks like he just woke up. The heartbreaking thing about it is the way Eddie's face breaks when he sees him, going from vaguely sleepy to heartbroken in the blink of an eye. Through the fog of his breath in the late March evening, he can see the way Eddie bites on the inside of his lip to keep from immediately crying.

There's a little fog on his window, so Richie lifts up a fingerless-glove clad hand and draws in a little heart, giving him a sheepish look.

Eddie's face reads some awful combination of sad and angry as he trudges over to the window and opens it. He can't imagine he'd be a very good boyfriend if the expression did anything other than feel like an ice pick to the heart, but God does it hurt knowing that he's the reason behind it.

It's always been his goal to make Eddie laugh. He has such a cute smile, such a heartwarming giggle. There's nothing that makes Richie weaker than a good, genuine Eddie Kaspbrak laugh -- all the better if he's the source of it. He doesn't necessarily get jealous when Eddie laughs at one of Mike's jokes or at something Stan says, but it does make him a little needy, all clingy and whiny and in need of the reassurance that Eddie still thinks he's the funniest.

Something tells him that tonight, he's not going to get many

reassurances. It's his turn to give them.

"Don't let all the heat out," Eddie says and though his words are supposed to be biting, they mostly sound disappointed due to the fact that he's trying to bite back tears. Richie climbs in -- this was much, much easier when he was about 30 pounds lighter and five inches shorter -- and shuts the window behind him, pulling Eddie in by the head to smack a kiss on his temple.

"Hey, Spaghetti," Richie greets, a little breathless, and he starts stripping out of his snow clothes. It should say a lot that Richie had been climbing up through that same route for months at a time, even in the fucking snow, for years now. He pulls his jacket off, and his gloves and his hat and everything else until he's dressed similarly to Eddie.

"You said goodbye already, I don't know why you're rubbing salt in the wound," Eddie says, sniffing and rubbing at his nose. He's perched up at the head of his bed, his feet barely tucked into the blankets. He looks like he wants to tell Richie that he hates him with the little glare he's giving him and the way his nostrils are flaring.

Honestly, Eddie probably does hate him a little right now. He knows that. This whole situation isn't easy, and it's never been easy between them. The way they... are, yeah. How they get along and their love for one another, God, it's the easiest thing in the world to Richie. It comes to him like breathing or blinking or dick jokes, the same innate way a baby bird learns to fly or a baby turtle heads right for the surf. But what they *have*, well. That's a different story. They have to work for it, every single day. It's not a chore but it is tiring, always watching their backs, always hyperaware of their actions around one another, always sleeping with one eye open because they simply can't afford not to.

(He thinks about the time he caught Eddie in the boys' bathroom, frantically scrubbing at the wall with an alcohol wipe. He tried to keep Richie out, but he was tall enough to just go into the next stall and stand on the toilet to see what he was doing. It'd been nearly scrubbed away, but there in big, angry letters were:

RICHIE TOZIER IS A FAGGOT.

Richie had gotten mad at him for trying to get rid of it, saying someone would just write it again and it'd draw more attention to him and that whoever had written it would think that it was him who took it down. Eddie had gotten mad at him back, for getting mad at him. He was scared. They both were.)

"I had to come and get all my sweatshirts that you stole," Richie jokes. It's a bad situation and Eddie looks like he's on the verge of crying, really, but he's hoping the little quip makes his boyfriend smile a little.

It's quite obviously not the right thing to say because of how Eddie's face screws up in the most awful way and even in the low light Richie can see tears leak down his cheeks and how he tucks his hands into his sleeves to wipe at his face. His narrow shoulders shake with the silent sobs racking through him and Richie moves to him. He hates that this is his fault, that he's the one behind Eddie's sobs and all of this pain is his fault.

When Eddie sees that he's coming over to comfort him, he kicks out at Richie, landing a weak kick at his stomach. It's not enough to hurt, obviously, it's just to keep him away. "Why are you here?" Eddie

hisses through his sobs, kicking at him again to keep him away. "You're such an asshole. You already said goodbye, so just go!"

"Eddie, shut up," Richie hisses lowly. He's being too loud for his mother being just downstairs.

"You're really fucking worried about getting caught right now?" Eddie asks, but his voice is quiet again. Richie doesn't tell him that he's not scared of getting caught by his dumb mom, he's leaving anyway. He's scared of what Eddie will have to deal with if they do. "I don't want to do this, Richie," Eddie sobs, one hand moving to cover his mouth and his eyes squeezing shut while he sobs into his sleeve.

Richie catches Eddie's leg and moves it to the side, stepping up to the bed and pulling Eddie's head to his chest as he climbs onto the bed. Eddie instantly moves his hand, pulling his face into Richie's chest while he sobs. "I hate you so much," Eddie sobs. Richie knows that no words will fix this, and they probably won't do much to help, so he doesn't say anything other than a quiet *I know* while he kisses Eddie's hair and pets his head.

Eddie, on the other hand, knows he's selfish to ask Richie to stay when Richie wants to go. Richie has a plan and a dream and no reason to stay here anymore. Since Richie told him that he was going to leave because he 'just doesn't have anything here,' the words *what about me?* have been waiting on his tongue. He's not going to say it, of course, because that's selfish. He doesn't want to be selfish. He should be supportive, Richie is following his dream and all. What's he doing, rotting here in Derry? Entertaining the thoughts of his sick mother? At least Richie was trying to do something with his future.

Richie lets him cry it out against his chest. He kisses his head and pets through his hair, wipes tears from his cheek and rubs his back. "My head hurts," Eddie says when he's all cried out, when they're lying in his bed and Eddie has his head on Richie's chest and a hand over his boyfriend's heart. Are they still boyfriends? Will they still be?

"You want an Advil or something?" Richie asks him quietly, and Eddie shakes his head, lets his eyes fall shut.

"It'll mess with my fluvoxamine," Eddie replies, and besides, the headache kind of hurts in a good way -- or maybe he's just being a masochist.

Richie keeps his eyes trained on the ceiling, absentmindedly touching Eddie. He's touched Eddie a lot over the years, but he's trying to sear this one into his head. Just in case.

For all the time they've been scared in the past, the future seems scary, too. Richies leaving, going off into the great unknown to chase a pipe dream across the country. Leaving his friends and his family and his Eds. It's not going to be easy, and sometimes... yeah, he does think maybe he'll end up burnt out with nothing left. Maybe he'll have left everything worth keeping here.

On the other hand, though, what's Derry got for him once his friends leave? Who's to say he won't end up burnt out with nothing left if he stays? In the end, both forks in the road are equally terrible and terrifying. He figures... if everything is going to fail, he'd rather it fail having tried at the very least.

It's not like his future over there is anything certain. It's the opposite, really, seeing as not a single thing over there is concrete and not a single part of his dream is guaranteed to happen. And using all his college money to go chase this dream, well. A wrong step could end him up across the country from anyone he regards as anything close to family without a dollar to his name.

They have this single pocket of certainty. This one little sliver of things not going wrong right there between the two of them. But staying right here with one another in Derry like this for the rest of their lives, that's no way to live. He knows Eddie wants to beg him to stay and he's, well, he's glad Eddie isn't selfish enough to do that. He's not sure he'd be able to look at the boy he loves in the eyes and tell him no.

He told himself he'd leave at midnight and, yeah, maybe they should've done something more interesting than just lay in bed near-silent for two hours on their last night together for the foreseeable future, but he doesn't know what to say. He doesn't want to upset Eddie any more than he already has. Besides, he's talked a lot through the years. Eddie probably wants some quiet.

(Eddie spends two hours waiting for him to say some dumb shit. He doesn't want to start not listening to Richie earlier than he has to.)

Richie lets out a sigh. The clock on the nightstand reads 11:49, so he should probably get ready to leave. Eddie seems to sense the impending movement and clutches Richie's shirt in his fist, and for a moment he can feel Eddie shake with desperation.

"Come here," Eddie says, pulling Richie in to kiss him. His voice breaks. He gets a brush of the lips before he pulls Richie in by the

neck, turning them chest to chest. Eddie kisses him desperately, trying to pull him in with the promise of sex, but when Richie pulls away and presses their foreheads together, he hears the uneven pacing of Eddie's breaths, sees the tremble of his jaw.

"Eds," Richie says, but Eddie pulls him back in and slips a thigh between his legs while he grinds against him.

"Richie," Eddie sends back, pulling him in again and trying to kiss him. When he can't quite catch Richie's lips, his voice breaks again, "Please."

"Eddie," Richie tries again, "c'mon." His hand finds Eddie's and pulls it from his shirt, pressing their foreheads together. "It's okay, Eds. It's okay."

"No," Eddie replies, starting to cry again. "No, no, it's not. I can't do this without you, Rich, please, I don't -- I don't want you to go," he cries.

Richie sits up and pulls Eddie in, tucking his face into his neck. "It's gonna be okay," Richie assures him, rocking him gently. "You're gonna be okay, Eds. You're gonna be just fine."

"You don't know that," Eddie sobs. "You don't -- you don't get it. You're the one leaving."

Richie swallows thickly, moving one hand from the back of Eddie's

neck to wipe his eye. He can't cry. He needs to be strong for Eddie right now because Eddie is right. He's the one leaving. "You're gonna be fine, baby," Richie promises. "You're gonna be so good, Eddie. You're gonna go so far, okay? You don't need me."

"Yes I do," Eddie wept.

"No," Richie promised him. He pulled back a little, just to see his face. He climbed off the bed but kept Eddie's forehead pressed against his. Richie gently dried Eddie's cheeks, giving him a little shake of the head. "No, no you don't, okay? Listen to me. You're gonna go so far, Eds, you're gonna do so much. I know it, right? I just need you to know it."

Eddie doesn't say anything back. Eddie shifts, keening upwards and places a soft but insistent kiss on his lips.

They stay like that a moment longer, Richie gently stroking his cheek with his thumb. It takes a long moment, but Eddie closes his eyes and squeezes Richie's wrist.

"Go."

Richie pulls his head against his chest and kisses the top of his head one last time. He pulls away wordlessly and goes to get his jacket and boots on, leaving Eddie sitting on the edge of his bed and staring at the floor.

He can't find it in him to lift his head, but he forces himself out of bed to hug him one last time.

"Look at it this way," Richie says while Eddie's face is pressed into the fabric of his puffer, "if you don't let me go, you'll never be able to brag about knowing me when you see me on SNL."

You don't need to be on SNL for me to brag about you , Eddie wants to say, but he keeps his mouth shut.

"Hey," Richie nudges him when his joke doesn't get a laugh. Tough crowd, he guesses. Eddie lifts his head finally, putting his chin on Richie's chest and looking up at him with swollen, red eyes. "Listen to me, okay? You gotta trust me. You trust me, right?"

Eddie nods. "I love you," he promises quietly.

"I love you, too. You gotta have some faith, okay? Listen to me," Richie pauses, just to make sure Eddie's paying attention. Listening. "You're so much braver than you think."

(He's just scared. They both are.)

It's another long pause before Richie nods, and Eddie nods back to wordlessly tell him he's listening. Richie gives him a soft smile, kisses his forehead, then gives him a playful slap on the cheek before pushing his window open. He climbs out onto the roof and shuts it behind him, then huffs on the pane and draws a little dick in the

frost. Eddie smiles, despite himself. Richie shakes the snow off the window screen and jams it back into place, then takes the scene in.

The softly falling snow, gentle glow of moonlight. Eddie standing there with his eyes red and his hair messy, looking sad and maybe a little proud in the window. Richie gives him a wave before stepping onto the tree branch and leaving the Kasprak house for the last time. He gets to his car and cranks the heat, gets comfortable in his seat and heads for Interstate 95.

He takes a deep breath as he pulls onto the road, shaking his head and wiping the hot tears from his cheeks.

4.

“Eddie,” Richie moans, and fuck does that name feel good on his lips. It feels right, like the only place for Eddie to belong is with him. Eddie’s feet tangled with his under sheets, Eddie’s hand in his, Eddie’s mouth on his dick, Eddie’s name on his lips. Obviously, Richie is big on romance.

He’s never stopped thinking about Eddie. He’s always had a type: shorter than him, dark-haired, dark eyes, sassy, boyish and pretty. Richie never puts a lot of thought into it, into why every hook-up he’s had since he left Derry fits the same description, but then again, maybe there’s not a lot of thought to be put into it.

The truth about him and Eddie, in honesty, is just that they couldn’t take the distance. Writing letters is hard when your mom screens your mail and you can’t exactly have secret boyfriend conversations

with your secret boyfriends when your mom is monitoring your phone calls. When Eddie goes to college he says he needs to prioritize and Richie encourages him to, tells him to focus on school because Richie will always be there. He knows this is important to him, getting away from home and making a life of his own, that this is important for *them* . For their life.

But the calls and the letters get fewer and further between. "I'm just tired," turns to "I'll call you later," turns into no calls at all. Richie doesn't know who sends the last letter or postcard or who calls the last time or any of that, just that they stop and neither of them makes the effort. He wants to be mad at Eddie for giving up, but he doesn't think that's what it is -- and besides, he knows he can just as easily pick up the phone himself and dial Eddie's number.

He doesn't think that any of it is just... Eddie's way of backing out. It can't be, because this isn't Eddie's style. Eddie would yell at him if he were mad or do something like that, he knows. Eddie isn't mad at him, just like he's not mad at Eddie.

Simply put, they grew apart. They're a continent away from one another and in different places in their lives and they're both trying to make it. Richie thinks it'd be nice, though, to call him sometimes. He still never picks up the phone.

Richie's hand curls tighter in the head of dark hair beneath him, letting out another loud grunt. "Oh, fuck, Eds," he gasps, "yeah, Eddie that's --" Richie's head tips back as he comes, letting out another loud groan, his fingers tight in the flesh of Eddie's ass as he finishes.

Richie slips out and pulls the condom off -- he doesn't bother tying it

off before dropping it into the trash because he's a heathen at heart -- then relaxes against the pillows. Beside him, his partner is climbing off the bed. "Where are you going?" Richie asks, reaching for him vaguely. "Don't you want me to --" Richie might be a little bit of an asshole but he's not a selfish lover.

He doesn't get a chance to finish his thought because there's a finger pressed painfully up against his chest. "Fuck you," comes the reply, "my name is Tom, you asshole. Who the fuck is Eddie?"

He doesn't really need this guy -- Tom, apparently -- to tell him that he's not Eddie because he can very much tell that he's not Eddie by now. They don't look anything alike. His brows and nose are all wrong and his lips are too thin and his jaw is too wide and he doesn't have cute freckles dotted across his nose like he's supposed to. His shoulders are too broad and his waist too narrow and... no, this couldn't be Eddie, never.

He's a little crossfaded so he's going to blame the mix-up on that, and the fact that he doesn't have his glasses on because the frames on this pair are stretched and don't stay on all that well during sex. He never... he never really thought the man beneath him was Eddie, after all. He's too hyper-aware of Eddie's... Eddie-isms to think that, but obviously, it was close enough to trick his foggy little brain into letting that slip.

Not-Eddie is still ranting at him while he pulls on a blue shirt that would be far too dull for Eddie to wear. "And then you come up to me at the bar, feeding me lines about how fucking cute I am, and I think you're actually a decent fucking guy and not some utter sleazebag like the rest of them, but fucking of course not. Of course, you have to say some other douchebag's fucking name!" He yells the last part, and Richie has the urge to tell him that Eddie most certainly

is not a douchebag.

Well, he is, maybe, a little, but this random Pennsylvanian twink doesn't get to call Eddie a douche, especially not when he's wearing fucking Sperrys. Eddie is his douche.

Not that he could say any of that, because, you know... his thought process is maybe not the sharpest right now but somehow he knows not to start talking about how the guy who the name belongs to is actually a really nice dude and deserves the whole world. Not-Eddie would probably not appreciate that very much.

His point is, he supposes, that this one isn't special.

"I'm sorry," Richie says, not because he particularly cares but because he thinks it's what he's supposed to. This is a one night stand, after all, and he'd feel pretty shitty about it if it happened to him, but he'd also probably just laugh it off, too. "Hey, come on, I'm -- it slipped, okay? I'm sorry."

"What's my name?" He asks, going still. His chest is heaving and there's, like, proper rage in his eyes as he stares down at Richie.

Fuck, Richie thinks. He just said it, Richie knows that. He just fucking said it, but Richie had been processing the fact that he'd just said Eddie's name during sex when he hadn't seen Eddie in fucking years. Is he really that repressed? He regrets asking himself that -- he doesn't want to know the answer.

Richie's mouth opens and closes a few times like a fish and not-Eddie stomps his foot like an acrimonious child. "You are *such* an asshole!" He yells, then fixes his belt. "Fuck you," he spits at Richie, "and that fucking joke about the mouse isn't even funny. Stop saying it." The twink flips him double middle fingers, then storms out of Richie's hotel room.

Richie blinks at the space the guy had occupied. He feels a little like he's been riding on the teacups at Disneyland, like he was just spun violently and expeditiously before being dropped on his ass. He lets himself go limp against the duvet, one hand coming up to rub at his temples.

Eddie.

That, admittedly, all could have gone better. Starting with the name thing and ending, again, with a name. He stares up at the ceiling, white and plain over him and tries to just... comprehend. His mind is swirling around with *EddieEddieEddieEddieEddie* and doesn't leave much room left for the poor sod who just left.

He sometimes has abstract thoughts about Eddie. Writes a joke that he thinks Eddie would absolutely hate, or takes half a Xanax and thinks of him distantly, or when he sees something advertised as hypoallergenic.

It's all he can think of now. When he left, Eddie was... meek, in some aspects. So unaware of his own bravery that he was scared of everything. He was shorter than Richie even then, but he'd been letting his hair grow out a little and it had started to curl in pretty ringlets around his face in a way that Richie couldn't get enough of. He got skinny, skinny like Richie was when he was a little kid,

getting these dainty little wrists to go with his pretty little hands. He grew into his face more, too, with delicate cheekbones and cute peony lips, thick lashes framing warm brown eyes. Richie had talked about how cute Eddie was when they were stupid little 13-year-olds but he'd evolved by the time they were 17 to adopt 'pretty' and 'captivating' and maybe even 'breathtaking,' at least in Richie's opinion.

He wonders what he looks like now, where he is, if he ever made it to New York like he dreamed of. If he let his hair grow long, if he's still talking to any of the other Losers, if he's out, if he's happy, if he's seeing someone, if he watches Richie's TV specials eve, if he ever thinks of Richie, if he's ever accidentally said Richie's name during sex, if he has a weird, ultra-specific type like Richie does.

Richie sits up and turns over, putting his hand over the landline on the bedside table. This could go really badly, he realizes. This guy is obviously scorned and has presumably much less to lose than Richie does, so not very much is stopping him from running to the presses and telling them that Richie Tozier took him back to his hotel room.

He doesn't have much proof other than knowing where Richie is staying and maybe the room number but it's the least important part of the equation right now. He's learned, since coming into the public eye, that tabloid publications very seldom need much proof of anything to publish something. They'll spin it like the truth, and all it takes is one rumor. It doesn't even need to be true for him to see 'Richie Tozier, Flaming Homo' in the press tomorrow. He should call his manager or his publicist or his agent or someone because they'd know what to do better than he does.

Richie has always felt like he's walking a tightrope. Like he's standing on the precipice of something truly awful and he's toeing the edge of

the cliff, just a simple nudge away from falling off and ruining everything he's made for himself. It was like that before he left for Derry and the fear is still there, still always lingering in the back of his mind. It makes him sweat when he forces laughter at a gay joke or makes the hair on the back of his neck stand up when another comedian makes a joke about him. There's always this initial, gut-wrenching panic of *they know* . He knows they don't, he knows that there's no way for them to know, but it doesn't help the fact that he feels like he's the one being left out of a secret about him, like somehow everyone knows that he's gay and they're all laughing at it behind his back without ever outright saying it.

(He thinks about being sixteen again. About Eddie crying to him the first time they'd ever touched one another, asking if what they're doing was dirty.

"No," Richie had said so fiercely because sometimes he felt the same way. "It's not, Eds. It's not fucking dirty, okay, because --" something like what he felt, all the love in his heart and the way Eddie made him feel fearless and brave and invincible, nothing could ever be wrong about that.

He knows that Eddie doesn't mean it like that. Everyones saying that there's a disease and only gay people can get it because they are the disease because this is what they deserve. Eddie's mom tells him to stay away from anyone he thinks might be queer. Trying just to exist is hard enough on its own.

Richie knows Eddie loves him back, even if neither of them says it.

He's just scared. They both are.)

In the end, he doesn't. Richie can feel his self hatred sneaking back up on him -- it never leaves all the way, it's always there, but sometimes he can quiet it down a little. When he's making jokes or pulling a funny voice or he's drinking.

He doesn't call anyone, because he realizes it probably won't do much good. They'll put him in a fake relationship with some girl too pretty to realistically be with him and they'll have to go on a bunch of awful, fake dates and Richie has a feeling he'll end up looking so uncomfortable it'll erase any questions about his sexuality. He also risks outing this poor random dude and Richie's already been enough of a dick to him.

It's scary enough to make him sick, but in the end, Richie doesn't call anyone.

5.

The thing about being a big wig comedy star like himself is that, at any moment, his schedule is subject to vast amounts of change.

It doesn't matter if he's waiting for his order at the bodega, if he's in line to piss, if he's at a concert, if he's asleep. When he needs to leave, he needs to leave. He's lucky enough to have a competent enough team behind him that it doesn't happen very often that he's completely and gracelessly yanked out of a situation, but there have definitely been times when the calendar on his phone says 'Flight to Miami: 4:10' and his manager is telling him that he's supposed to be at the airport now to go to Seattle.

(He won't admit it, but it's also a fucking baller excuse to pull up when he wants to leave a party. Oh, yeah, I'd love to get a drink, but I've gotta head to Chicago! Toodles!)

He sleeps fine on planes and doesn't mind the traveling, so in all, it's not so bad. He likes getting to bounce from place to place to place. It's not like his place in LA is much of a home, anyway. There's no family there and he doesn't have many friends, really. He has plenty of associates and acquaintances and whatever else, people who he acts friendly with, but no one he might go to with a secret. When Bill is in town they hang out plenty, which helps a lot, but Bill is just as busy as he is.

It's kind of nice to have someone who gets it a little. Who doesn't mind when you text 'shit, forgot about lunch, I'm in Vancouver' because they did the same thing last month. And Bill is good at giving feedback for his jokes and will go to shitty rock shows with him without making Richie beg.

It's not like he never gets to see any of his other friends, either. He bugs Stan every time he's in Atlanta, sometimes catches Ben or Bev in NYC when they're not in Chicago, and Mike Hanlon is about the only tolerable thing Richie can find in all of Florida. There's only one person who just... never seems to come up.

It's fine. Ben says Eddie is doing good, but Richie always changes the subject before he can elaborate. He thinks hearing about Eddie now will make him do something idiotic, like go hunt Eddie down and see how he's doing.

He wants to go to Bev's engagement party -- well, he supposes it's Ben and Bev's engagement party, but he's still thinking of it as Bev's, sorry Ben -- but his calendar says he's in Montreal and when he double checks with his agent, they confirm it. He gives Ben some money and makes him promise to get a stupid expensive bottle of champagne as a wedding gift from him, because apparently getting engaged is an event you get gifts for. Richie didn't know that. He tells Bill to give her a banana, too, from him and not to ask any questions. Bill nods and tells him he doesn't want to know.

Richie mostly forgets about it because it's not on his calendar, right up until Beverly sends him a picture of her kissing Bill's cheek, the bottle of champagne in his hands. ' *Miss you!* ' it reads, ' *Wish you were here!* 🍌 🍌 🍌 '

Richie realizes distantly that, right, he kind of *is* here. Something had gotten super messed up with his schedule and his agent had been utterly apologetic even though Richie didn't care, as long as nothing was wrong or anything like that. And then some director Bill had introduced him to called and asked if he could voice a part for a movie, if he could fly in to New York City that day and he'd gone and now he was... probably a ten minute cab ride from Bev and Ben's place.

Without thinking about it much, Richie pulls on his jacket and heads for the door. It'll be a nice surprise for Bev, at least. After such a quick day he was mostly just going to pass the fuck out, worry about seeing Stan and her tomorrow, maybe Ben if he wasn't... designing a castle or something in England, but he's confident once he gets a few vodka RedBulls in him he'll be a-okay.

The doorman lets him up -- he knows Richie, 'cause Richie always gives him a pun at the door when he comes in -- and he finds himself

in a very full New York penthouse. There are plenty of faces he doesn't recognize, a few he knows somewhat decently, and one red back-of-the-head he can see well enough.

Richie walks up behind her and slips a hand over her eyes, then gets down by her ear. "Guess who?"

Mike kind of ruins it by cheering Richie's name upon seeing him, but Beverly still lets a smile split her face as she turns around and stands to hug him. "Richie!"

"What's up?" He laughs, giving Beverly a hug before pulling away to hug Mike hello, too.

"I thought you were supposed to be in Montreal!" She says.

"Yeah, you know, I thought I was, too, but something came up and they wanted me here for the weekend and -- well, I mean, now I feel like a scrub. Mikey here comes up from Florida but I'm an hour flight away and can't come?"

Beverly and Mike laugh. "We're glad to see you, dude, it's a good surprise," Mike nods and Richie slaps him lightly on the arm.

"Thanks, man."

"And thank you for the champagne," Beverly adds, "and the

banana.”

“What’s -- am I missing something with the banana joke?” Mike asks, and Beverly snorts out a laugh, then nods.

“So, when we were, you know, teenagers... we always kind of had this running joke about --” Beverly is cut off by noticing Ben about to pass by, where she grabs him gently by the arm. “Baby, look who’s here! Richie’s here!

There’s another reunion and Beverly has to get them quieted down so she can repeat that she’s explaining the banana joke. Shortly after that, someone bumps into Richie and walks between him and his friends with a brisk ‘excuse me.’

“Sorry, I really need to pass,” the man says, though he’s really just standing in front of Richie and blocking him from the conversation.

“Yeah, man,” Richie says, even though the dude has a clear path out of the group, and then, “you’re such an asshole,” he laughs.

Stan gives him a smile, then a brief hug. “What’s up, man? I didn’t know you were coming.”

“Yeah, dude, neither did I. It was kind of a last minute thing,” Richie shrugs.

“Well, now that I know you’re here, Beverly, thank you for having us --” Stans cut off by a round of laughter and Richie reaches up to mess up his hair.

“Stan, you’re staying. Listen to the banana story,” she says, tucking herself beneath Ben’s arm. “Okay, so, where was I?”

Even though Richie isn’t much one for parties like this, being back with his friends is like a breath of fresh air. Ben and Bev get pulled off to go do host stuff, but Richie is more than happy to find a few futons and catch up with Mike and Stan for a while and share a couple drinks.

Beverly sneaks back up on them, grabbing Richie’s shoulder. “Come on!” She calls, waving them all towards the bar. “We’re gonna do blowjobs!”

“I’m not doing that,” Stanley says immediately, and Bev doesn’t miss a beat.

“Mikey, Rich, come on!”

Mike seems on board, following after Beverly obediently, so Richie follows suit. She’s gathered a few people around the bar, each one with a shot appropriately distanced away. “You have to put your hands behind your back,” Beverly says, hers already neatly clasped. Mike laughs, nudges him and shrugs before putting his hands behind his back. Richie follows suit and inches a little closer.

“On three,” Beverly grins and the others around her nod. “One, two, three!”

Richie leans forwards in tandem with everyone else, wrapping his lips around the shot glass before throwing his head back. He’s never really been a huge fan of creamy liquor, but this one tastes decently enough. There’s laughter all around them -- it sounds like one of Bev’s friends on her other side may have spilled her shot -- and Richie lowers his head back down with the shot glass still held between his lips and his eyes fall on Bill across the room from him.

But seeing Eddie there, standing next to Bill with this soft, awed expression on his face makes Richie feel a bit like he’s having a stroke. There’s a shock that flies up his spine, terror and excitement and exhilaration and fear. His mouth goes slack for a second and the shot glass slips from his lips, his hands scrambling to catch it in front of him. He’s got tunnel vision right now, watching Eddie watching him.

Richie didn’t make a habit of thinking of Eddie, especially not after the name thing, but somehow Eddie looks exactly how Richie pictured him all this time. He’s still short, still has his slight frame of narrow shoulders, and though he can’t see it Richie knows he has a narrow waist to go with it. He’s filled out more and gained some muscle, because though his shoulders are still narrow he’s not nearly as lithe as he was as a teenager. His hair is neater now, cropped short and gelled cleanly. His eyebrows have grown in more and his face has lost some of it’s femininity and boyishness but he’s just as beautiful as he was at 13, or at 17. He has a suggestion of a five-o’clock shadow on his face and there’s a quiet excitement in his eyes.

There’s no way to tell in the moment what Eddie thinks of him. If he’s angry at Richie for all those years without a call or a letter. If he

blames himself or Richie for them falling apart, if he's upset or excited or wants to talk or never wants to see him again. He gets a little shiver of anxiety, one that makes his hands feel hot.

(Like he's 15 again, thinking about holding hands with a boy.)

Someone near them yells something about engagement scavenger hunts and it draws some of the crowd away, leaving them nearly alone in the room. Richie clumsily and without looking places the shot glass on the counter, then swallows -- he didn't realize his mouth had been open that whole time and now his tongue is dry like he's been sucking on napkins -- before smiling gently.

It's Eddie.

Richie's feet guide him a little closer, one step at a time before he's standing in front of him. He's not sure why this all feels so surreal. They're just two people, of course they could bump into one another at a party.

He wants to say something clever and funny to make Eddie laugh like it's the old days. Maybe something that tied back to the last time they spoke, or saw each other, or the first conversation they had when they were seven. Unfortunately his brain is screaming one thing over and over and over and it's all just Eddie. There's no room for anything else.

He feels a little scared, and he thinks maybe Eddie does too.

“Hey, stranger.”

It makes Eddie smile wider, at least. “I didn’t know you were coming,” he says.

“I almost didn’t,” Richie admits, then swallows. “But I’m glad I did.”

Eddie nods, then steps forwards and hugs him. “Me, too.”

Turns out that they’re still just as close as they were however many years ago. They get a few more drinks and find a corner and just talk. They talk for hours, only taking a break to team up for engagement jeopardy, where they proceed to get way too invested into the game and also annihilate everyone else.

It feels perfect. Perfect and wonderful and magical and like they didn’t miss a single day, like they’re just catching up after being apart for a few hours. The rest of their friends come by and make appearances, say goodbye, Stan makes a joke about his refusal to be in between them anymore, and before they’re anywhere close to being finished talking, it’s somehow almost three in the morning and Bev and Ben are very politely kicking them out.

“I don’t want tonight to end,” Eddie admits to him on the front steps of the apartment building.

Richie shakes his head, “Me, either. Do you --” he shakes his head again, then laughs a little as Eddie smiles. He already knows what

he's going to say. "Do you wanna go somewhere, or -- or do something?"

"Yeah," Eddie says, nodding. "Yeah, I want to."

A smile splits Richie's face, almost a little in disbelief. "Okay," he nods back, then steps out onto the sidewalk. "Let's go."

+1.

He has to say, Eddie did a fantastic job.

And for what it's worth, Richie isn't an asshole. He tried not to buy into the whole 'aloof manbaby husband who secretly hates his spouse and is utterly useless on his own' ideal and made a very valiant attempt at participating in the wedding planning, but he also doesn't understand a thing about design.

He tries to help with the wedding colors, at least, because it feels like a simple enough thing that there isn't a way in hell he could fuck it up.

Eddie hums and kisses his cheek after he genuinely suggests incorporating animal print and neon orange. "Baby, I love you."

"It'll be, like, retro! Throwback, come on. Get some glow in the dark stuff, fishnet. We fell in love in the eighties."

“Some things go out of style for a reason, Rich,” Beverly nods in agreement.

“And I love you but I think Stan would kill me if I took aesthetic advice from someone who’s personal style hasn’t changed since he was thirteen.”

“Hey,” Richie shoots back, “ *who* was wearing my Bike & Cycle Shoppe shirt last night?”

Beverly closes her eyes. “Please at least tell me you purchased a second shirt and it’s not the actual one from when you were in middle school.”

“You’re gonna go,” Eddie tells him. “And I’m gonna call you when it’s time to go test cake.”

“Can I just sit here and look pretty?” Richie tries.

“No,” Eddie shakes his head, pulling over a copy of *Wedding Style* and opening it up. “You’re too distracting. I love you, but no.”

He guesses it’s a compliment, in a way. The point is, though, that Eddie did a fantastic job setting this whole thing up. They’re in a refurbished synagogue that Eddie had filled with more flowers and greenery than Richie knew it was possible to buy. It’s not too big or

flashy, more organic and veritable.

Richie is dressed in a black three piece suit for the affair, watching while his friends walk slowly towards him down the aisle. Stan and Bev finish it off, each finding their place on either sides of him. Stan pats him on the shoulder with a smile as he walks behind him, Bev beaming at him.

There's only one person left to come down.

"Are you nervous?" Beverly asks quietly from across the altar.

Richie looks down the aisle, and normally, yeah, he would be. It's the same reason he doesn't love being on talk shows all the time. There isn't much humor to hide behind here. It's all raw and real and the friends and family they have sitting in front of him are seeing that, seeing the parts of himself that he's hated and loved and struggled with since he knew he felt differently for Eddie than the rest of the Losers did.

The doors start to open again and a shot of adrenaline shoots through him, a bright smile overcoming his face. He glances back at Beverly and shakes his head. "No," he answers easily, truthfully.

Richie turns back towards the aisle to watch his fiance.

No, he's not scared. Neither of them are.